

Notice to Disaster Victims

When mass disasters strike, victims and their families should follow these five simple rules to protect their legal rights.

1. You don't have to speak to anyone.

Feel free to talk to emergency personnel, who are there to help you. You can also talk to volunteer lawyers from the Mass Disaster Response team of the New York State Bar Association. They are there to provide free legal advice and help you find a lawyer if you want one. Be cautious about talking to anyone else – they may not be there to help you.

2. You don't have to make decisions now.

You may eventually decide to hire a lawyer and make a legal claim based on the disaster. But that is an important decision. So you should make it when you are less stressed, your mind is clear and you have all relevant information. We recommend that you see a lawyer within 60 days of the disaster.

3. Talk to a lawyer before signing papers.

You may be offered money settlements and asked to sign forms waiving your right to make a legal claim. You should not sign anything without first consulting a lawyer.

4. Lawyers should not contact you.

Lawyers are not supposed to approach you in person or by telephone to offer their services. They are permitted to write to you. If a lawyer improperly solicits business, you can report that to the NYSBA Mass Disaster Response Team.

5. You can call (800) 342-3661 for a lawyer.

To find the right lawyer, you could ask family or friends for recommendations or call the NYSBA lawyer referral service at the number above.

This message is brought to you as a public service by the New York State Bar Association.